

Testimony to the Appropriations Committee
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Senator Bye, Representative Lesser, and legislative members of the Appropriations Committee: Thank you for this opportunity to testify regarding the **Commission on Children**.

My name is Betty Sugerman Weintraub, and I am the associate director for grantmaking and community initiatives of the Liberty Bank Foundation. Our foundation supports preventive programs that assist low- and moderate-income families to reach their goals and achieve their potential. Toward that end, we provide financial support for nonprofit programs that benefit families and children, and we act as a philanthropic leader to bring people from different sectors together to address issues and collaborate on solutions.

Partnership with the Commission on Children

Over the past several years, the Liberty Bank Foundation has found the Commission to be an effective and knowledgeable partner on projects that benefit the families and children of our state. Two projects that our staff and those of the Commission have worked on quite closely are the development of the WorkPath Fund and the propagation of parent engagement programs throughout our service area.

Regarding our work in coordination with the Commission to develop the WorkPath Fund: In early 2010, the Connecticut General Assembly passed Substitute House Bill No. 5360; Public Act No. 10-133; *An Act Concerning Children in the Recession*. Section 10 of this Act called for research into the establishment of a Loan/Bridge Fund to support families in crisis due to the effects of the recession in the areas of housing, utilities, hunger, and unemployment. In fall 2010, the Connecticut Commission on Children and the Liberty Bank Foundation convened a group of community stakeholders to address this issue. The stakeholders included social service agencies; philanthropy; United Way 2-1-1 Infoline; the state's Workforce Investment Boards; governmental agencies; and advocacy organizations.

After a significant amount of research, discussion, and exploration of alternatives, the stakeholders determined that the most effective way to assist parents in times of recession was to provide them with support for employment, since this would enable them to provide for their children. Consultation with the state's Workforce Investment Boards revealed that there was a substantial population of unemployed parents who had job offers and were ready to return to work, but who were prevented from doing so because of work-related expenses that they could not afford to pay. A system to provide for those expenses was in place at the CTWorks One-Stop Career Centers for those who were TANF and Workforce Investment Act eligible, but no aid was available to the many unemployed parents who did not qualify for these funds.

WorkPath Fund was designed to fill that gap. The goal of the fund is to remove barriers to employment for Connecticut parents with dependent children under 18 living in their households. Small grants will be paid directly to vendors to cover the costs of uniforms, transportation, child care, licenses, and other work-related necessities. These items may seem small, but to an unemployed parent, any one of them can present an insurmountable obstacle to returning to employment and being able to support his/her family.

WorkPath will be administered through the state's five Workforce Investment Boards. Parents in need of assistance will be able to access the fund through the WIBs, or by calling United Way 211 Infoline, which will refer them to the One-Stop Career Center in their area. In large part due to the partnership between our foundation and the Commission, the planning for WorkPath is now complete. The fund is ready to begin operations. Our staff and the Commission's are now reaching out to private philanthropic funders statewide for the seed money to make it a reality.

Regarding the expansion of the Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI) and Parents Seeking Educational Excellence (PSEE): Research studies show a clear linkage between student achievement and family involvement. Students whose parents are involved in their education are more likely to have higher grades and test scores, attend school regularly, pass their classes and be promoted, have fewer discipline problems, and graduate and pursue higher education.

Given the research findings, the Commission on Children developed two programs designed to foster parent engagement: the Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI), which gives parents the knowledge and tools to get involved as change agents in their communities and schools, and, in conjunction with the Center for School Change, the Parents Supporting Educational Excellence (Parents SEE), a program that provides parents with the knowledge, skills and tools they need to partner with schools to improve education.

The Liberty Bank Foundation has been supporting parent engagement programs for eight years now and has worked to start and restart PLTI programs within our footprint. As a foundation, we have been so impressed with the effectiveness of PLTI and Parents SEE that we have joined with the Commission to promote the formation of local collaboratives to present these programs. The result has been that seven different towns have implemented the programs over the past couple of years. Commission staff have trained local facilitators and provided curriculum materials, while our Foundation staff employed their local knowledge to convene stakeholders who can carry the programs forward.

We believe strongly in the life-enhancing power of these parent engagement programs, as evidenced by the fact that we invested over \$35,000 in them during 2012 alone. We have also funded grants to the Commission on Children and to the Connecticut Center for School Change to support the administration of these programs, believing that these

agencies play a vital role in training, curriculum development and standardization, and support for the local collaboratives that actually deliver the programming. Not only do PLTI and Parents SEE benefit the parents who attend, and their children, but they also have a ripple effect that spreads to friends, families, and neighbors, linking communities closer together.

In summary, the partnership between the Liberty Bank Foundation and the Commission on Children is a wonderful example of how a state initiative can leverage the human and financial capital of a private philanthropy to the benefit of Connecticut residents. The Commission is to be commended for its ability to convene stakeholders, connect to resources, apply data, and take action for families and children in our state. On behalf of our foundation, I would like to express our gratitude to Executive Director Elaine Zimmerman and her staff for being such outstanding partners to us and such extraordinary advocates for Connecticut's children.

